

The Knowledge Institute on Child and Youth Mental Health and Addictions



2023 Impact report



A serene forest scene with sunlight filtering through tall trees and a field of white flowers in the foreground. The text is centered over the image.

**We recognize the history, strengths and diversity
of First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities.**

**The land known as Ontario is covered by 46 treaties and other agreements.
As a provincial organization, we operate throughout the many traditional territories
relevant to these agreements. Our office is located on the traditional
unceded territory of the Anishinaabe Algonquin Nation.**

**We are committed to engaging respectfully with Indigenous children,
young people and families within and across nations.**

Finding balance, building on strengths

Let's take a moment to reflect on the remarkable year we have had in the child and youth mental health and addictions sector.

The Knowledge Institute's work has always been about bringing people and knowledge together to provide high-quality care. This unwavering focus — which has served us well throughout the challenges of the last few years — will carry us forward now and into the future.

There is one thing that has remained steadfast through all the ups and downs of the recent years: the spirit of collaboration. Whether across members of our team at the Knowledge Institute, or along with all of our agency and other provincial partners, this is one of the many strengths we can lean on and leverage to address the longer-term impacts of the pandemic.

Children don't live within the boundaries of a single sector, and as such, our efforts must transcend these limits. Collaboration across sectors is essential to making sure children, young people and their families receive the right care at the right time and in the setting that works best for them. By partnering together, pooling our expertise and breaking down barriers, we can continue to make a difference in the lives of every child and young person across the province.

The perspectives of children, young people and families guide everything we do and drive our passion for continuous quality improvement. And it is through their experiences that we continue to find purpose, reminding us of the profound impact we can have.

The years to come hold great promise. Now more than ever, we must remain steadfast in our commitment to ensuring high-quality, evidence-based child and youth mental health and addictions services for Ontario's children, young people and families. We look forward to continuing to support the child and youth mental health and addictions sector in this capacity, adapting our approach as new challenges arise.

As we get closer to the Knowledge Institute's 20th anniversary, we have much to be proud of. We would like to express our deepest gratitude to everyone who helped us get this far — our dedicated staff, councils and partners. We're pleased to be able to share highlights from their work in this report.



Purnima Sundar, Executive Director

Louis Doyle, Strategic Advisory Council Chair

Growing needs, growing strengths

Did you know that mental health issues accounted for four of the top 10 reasons that children and young people were hospitalized mid-pandemic – including reasons number one and two?

Over the past year, we've gotten a clearer picture of the realities of pandemic recovery and recognize that we're still very much in the process of recovering. At CHEO, we continue to see a high volume of young people with eating disorders and self-injury coming through the doors of the emergency department, and our inpatient mental health unit is routinely at or near capacity.

The overall complexity and acuity of needs also continues to increase. This underscores the importance of investing in

quality care, including intensive services, and building capacity throughout the system to respond to complex needs.

The Knowledge Institute has been a valuable partner on this front, supporting initiatives like the Provincial Training Initiative and addressing substance use and addictions-related needs among Ontario's young people and their families. As we go forward, I'm pleased to report that the Knowledge Institute will continue to provide these valuable supports for many years to come, beginning with a new contract in the 2023–24 fiscal year.

Certainly, we've all got our work cut out for us in the months and years to come, but collectively we'll achieve more than we ever

could have imagined a few short years ago. How can I be sure? Because we've already progressed by leaps and bounds through some tremendous challenges, and we're only getting better, sharper, and more capable overall!

The surge CHEO experienced last fall was unlike anything we've ever seen, and we needed all the help we could get. I'd like to extend a special thank you to the Knowledge Institute staff who have given their time as unit helpers in the hospital over the past year, particularly through holidays and overnight shifts. This really speaks to the Knowledge Institute's strong spirit of teamwork.



Joanne Lowe

Vice-President of Mental Health and Addictions, CHEO
Former Executive Director, Youth Services Bureau

Looking back, forging ahead

Taking a moment to honour our efforts (big and small) and celebrate how far we've come can help us draw new energy and inspiration for our continuing work.

In 2024, we'll launch a new strategic plan and we'll also celebrate our 20th anniversary as an organization. Preparing for both requires us to make time and space to reflect and plan, without losing momentum for our ongoing activities. With confirmed funding for the next five years, we can confidently continue work on many of the important collaborative initiatives shared in this report, launch even more exciting new projects, and support our sector for years to come!

One major project kicking off this year is the development of a new quality standard focusing on ensuring that levels of need are matched with the right level of care in our sector. Making sure that children, young people and their families can easily find and access the right services that meet their particular needs benefits them and others seeking care. We're currently in the scoping phase of our [standard development process](#) and beginning to form an advisory committee to work alongside our team. We look forward to sharing more about this work as it progresses.



2022-23 Snapshot

Consultations

291 coaching, consultation or program sessions

3,292 participants from agencies across Ontario

Webinars and events

7 webinars

16 workshops, presentations, posters and panels at 10 conferences

Resources and publications

1 article in peer reviewed journals, with more than a dozen others in progress, submitted or accepted

29 knowledge products, including:

11 evidence briefs

1 policy paper

3 learning resources for Good2Talk staff

Amplifying our value as a trusted system partner

Getting children, young people, and families the intensive supports they require is a priority for us and our partners. Over the past year, we built on our previous work to establish evidence-based recommendations for developing a provincial secure treatment program. Specifically, we worked with agencies and the Ministry of Health to define the target population and develop plans for a harmonized intake process. As well, we published [Mental health treatment programs for young people in secure settings: What does the evidence show?](#)

We also continued to collaborate with Ontario's Child and Youth Mental Health Lead Agency Consortium to advance work on provincial priorities and providing ongoing evidence, implementation, and evaluation support for:

- A Provincial Training Initiative, which aims to expand intensive community-based treatment options throughout the province by building the capacity of service providers to deliver this care.
- The [One Stop Talk](#) provincial virtual walk-in counselling service, launched in November 2022.

Other system-level contributions in 2022-23 included:

- Co-chairing the Ontario Coalition for Child and Youth Mental Health.
- Participating in Ontario Health's [Eating Disorders Quality Standard](#) Advisory Committee.
- Ongoing membership in the [Ontario Suicide Prevention Life Promotion Collaborative](#).
- Co-chairing the children and youth working group of the [National Mental Health and Substance Use Standardization Collaborative](#).

- Participating in the Canadian Institute for Health Information's expert advisory committee on indicators related to early intervention for mental health and substance use among children and young people.
- Ongoing membership in the client information systems enhancement working group for the Child and Youth Mental Health Business Intelligence Solution.



Growing a sector-wide culture of quality improvement

The second [Quest](#) cohort wrapped up in June 2022 and we conducted an evaluation of this program in the fall. A total of 129 individuals participated in six agency improvement projects (see figure 1) and in our quality improvement (QI) community of practice, Quality Connect, which focuses on sharing learning and networking to sustain ongoing QI efforts. Participants also received training in Lean Six Sigma methodologies.

In fact, 25 participants achieved yellow belt certification, reflecting our sector's maturing QI capacity. In January we kicked off the [third Quest cohort](#), supporting teams from seven agencies to advance organizational QI projects.

Over the past fiscal year, we continued to strengthen and expand our other QI supports.

- For the second year in a row, demand for our open (non-cohort) Lean Six Sigma White Belt training series exceeded our initial offerings, so we added a third session.
- We launched an advanced QI workgroup involving practitioners with black belt-level QI knowledge and expertise, focusing on system-level QI topics.
- We partnered with the Excellence in Quality Improvement Project (E-QIP), the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH), and Ontario Health to plan and deliver the QI Innovations: Better data, better decisions, better outcomes virtual conference in both 2022 and 2023.

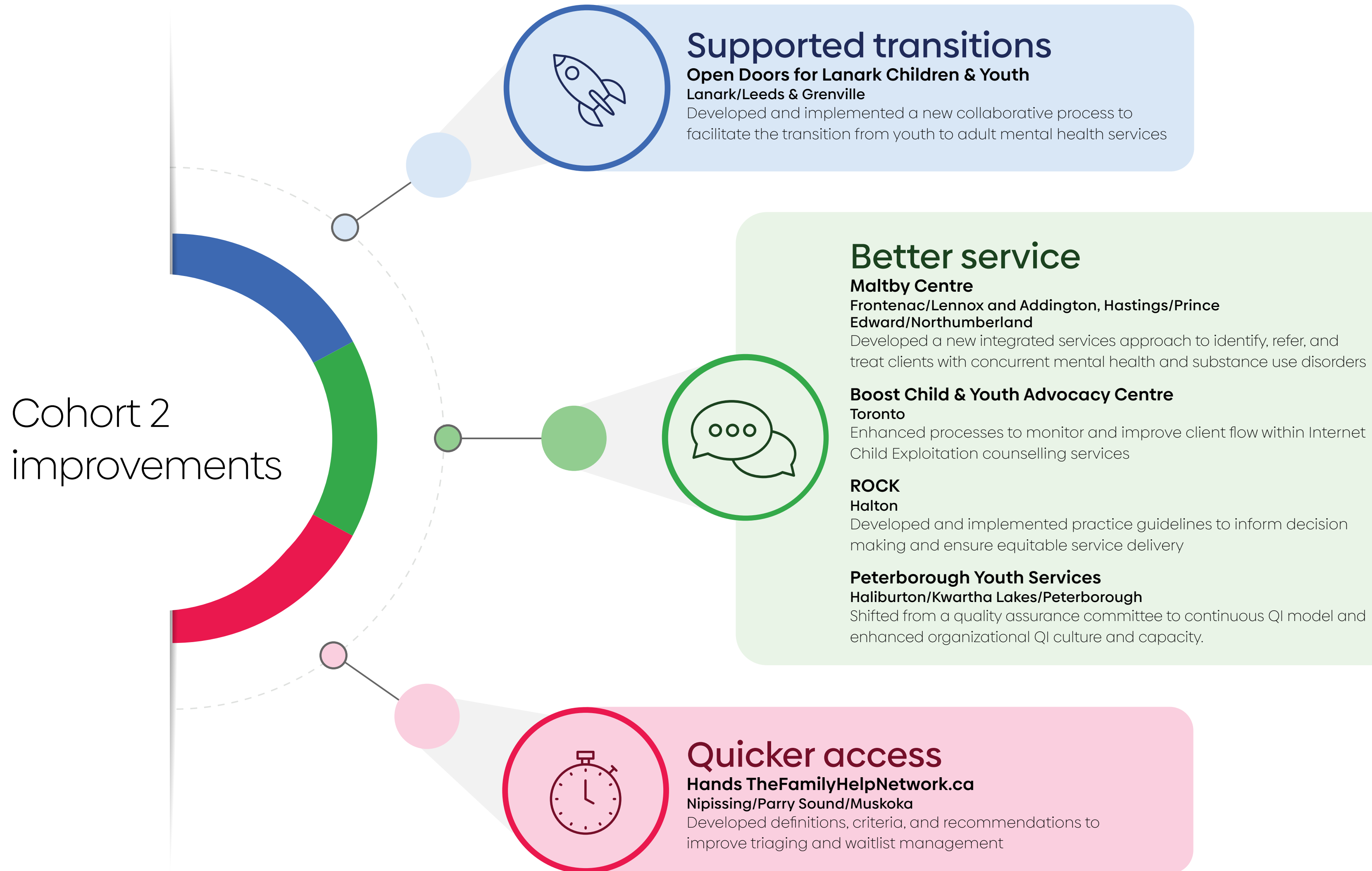
118 participants from 18 agencies earned white belt certificates through our various training sessions.

91% of cohort 2 participants reported feeling better prepared to support future improvement initiatives.

>1,000 participants at QI innovations conference



Figure 1: Cohort 2 improvements



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“It’s rare to find people in the same sector trying to overcome the same challenges and improve practices in the sector...(those) who are willing to share their experiences and be open about imperfect processes. There’s always more to learn. With the advanced QI workgroup, I don’t feel alone anymore.”

Magda M.

Manager of Continuous Quality Improvement
New Path Youth & Family Services

Nurturing innovation and equity

Six agencies that had received [Innovation Initiatives](#) grants completed their projects in 2022. This fourth round of grants offered up to \$50,000 to add or improve virtual mental healthcare offerings to better serve children, young people, and their families during and after the pandemic.

The 18-month projects included:

- Using virtual reality to deliver cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT).
- Providing asynchronous dialectical behavioural therapy (DBT) to young people.
- Creating a psychoeducational group for young people with both mental health and substance use issues.

Building on our [previous work to advance racial equity](#) in Ontario's child and youth mental health and addictions sector, we launched the call for our fifth round of Innovation Initiatives in fall 2022 to provide agencies with up to \$75,000 to implement and evaluate culturally responsive programs. We awarded five agencies with funds and ongoing coaching for their projects, which are just getting started. [Read the project summaries.](#)

4 resources produced to support equity, diversity and inclusion efforts across our sector

- [How to use race-based data to advance mental health equity.](#)
- [How to de-identify personal information when sharing data.](#)
- [An overview of culturally adapted programs.](#)
- [Centering culture to meet the needs of racialized children and young people.](#)



Helping sectors come together to better support young Ontarians

Our work on [integrated care pathways](#) is all about creating the most natural and efficient flow for clients to receive the services they need, when and where they need it. Schools play an important role in mental health promotion, prevention, early identification, and intervention. That's why we've been building the foundation to develop and implement care pathways between schools and the community-based organizations that provide

necessary, appropriate, and specialized mental health and addictions services.

The [Right time, right care](#) (RTRC) resource – which we published in April 2022 – provides principles and a framework to create an integrated system of care, rooted in strong collaboration between the health and education sectors. We also facilitated consultations on behalf of the ministries of health and education to better

understand what resources and supports are needed to support implementing this system of care. We heard from 163 people from school boards, community-based health organizations, and parent and student organizations, and generated 14 recommendations to support implementation of the RTRC model.

The collaborative working group that developed the resource identified 6 implementation drivers critical to rolling out an integrated system of care:

- Commitment.
- Cross-sectoral communication.
- Protocols, partnership agreements, and other collaborative tools.
- Consistent and systemic training.
- Robust data systems.
- Intermediary organizations and technical assistance.



Focusing on early intervention in the middle years

Early identification and intervention have been a particular focus for us since 2019, through our [early years project](#). Soon, we'll publish a resource to help communities to develop integrated early years care pathways that build on local strengths. In it, we'll share our lessons learned, which include tips for standardizing assessment tools across organizations and finding ways to strengthen partnerships, accountability, and communications across sectors.

In 2022 we extended our focus to look at ways to better support mental health in the middle years – ages 7 to 12. This is a critical period of transition for children and the developmental stage in which many mental health disorders start to emerge. In February

we published a policy paper [Stemming the tide: Investing early in the mental health of Ontario's 7- to 12-year-olds](#). We outlined seven evidence-based recommendations to encourage collaboration across sectors, strengthen mental health services, and guide decision makers to create a service system that meets the needs of this group of young people.

In the coming months we'll continue to mobilize the paper's findings, explore opportunities to partner with experts in this area, and leverage relevant work happening across the province. We also continue to collaborate with Infant and Early Mental Health Promotion at SickKids, supporting ongoing [research](#) to evaluate care pathways.



>800

service providers received early years training with our support, over the life of the project

Building, sharing and using consistent tools

Reliable care pathways require valid, reliable and easy-to-use tools. Our [HEADS-ED](#) and [HEADS-ED under 6](#) screening tools are just that. They help professionals across sectors identify when a young person may be experiencing a mental health concern and offer guidance on next steps. The original tool was piloted in hospital settings in Ontario and Nova Scotia several years ago and is now used widely, including at intake for the [One Stop Talk](#) virtual provincial walk-in clinic launched in November 2022.

We recently pilot-tested the adapted version of the tool – for children under the age of 6 – with a community mental health agency, social workers, and clinicians. The psychosocial variables were created based on existing milestone development and other tools, as well as

conversations with psychologists and psychiatrists. In February, we hosted a provincial training webinar showcasing both tools with 90 attendees from our sector.

One key change in our [primary care pathways](#) project sites is a move away from fax-based methods in favour of using an existing online platform that promotes integration of service referrals. We're now working with three sites to integrate the HEADS-ED tool into [OceanMD](#), a digital gateway for healthcare. This move will help integrate standardized screening and referrals between primary care and community mental health agency service providers.



40
**One Stop Talk therapists
trained on the HEADS-ED
under 6 screening tool**

Expanding and mobilizing knowledge

In 2022–23, we produced thirty-five research and knowledge products, on topics ranging from the [mental health implications of undiagnosed learning disabilities](#) to [working with children, young people, and families through high-conflict separation and divorce](#). As well, we:

- Developed and hosted “Spotlight on COVID-19 recovery,” a webinar series to explore key issues our sector faced as we began to emerge from the pandemic.
- Advanced work on two projects funded by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research:
 - » Participatory action research study led by our senior clinician scientist, building on previous work to understand the impact of the pandemic on the mental health of Ontario’s young people, and develop a corresponding service plan.
 - » Collaboration with the Kids Come First health team in eastern Ontario to analyze and use 1Call1Click data to predict upcoming care needs and inform service delivery.

- Continued our work in support of the Good2Talk helpline:
 - » Published three training resources and developed another about [supporting the mental health needs of students with and seeking refugee protection](#) (released this fiscal year).
 - » Evaluated the pilot for providing services in Mandarin.
 - » Assessed the feasibility of evaluating the texting service.
 - » Engaged in strategic discussions and consultations to shape the vision for Good2Talk for the next decade.
- Refreshed and re-published our [knowledge mobilization toolkit](#) to share the latest evidence and new content about clear language, storytelling, and navigating challenges related to KMb.

7,676 downloads of our resources.

519 webinar participants.

812 people viewed the webinar recordings



Creating new opportunities

In fall 2022, we launched another round of impact grants in partnership with Mental Health Research Canada (MHRC), this time challenging agencies to come up with innovative ideas to better understand how to respond to substance use and addictions issues in their communities. You can [learn about the selected projects](#), now underway. This year, we're developing new products to address the knowledge needs of the sector, and we'll work at mobilizing this knowledge in the coming year.

We also collaborated with MHRC to support the next generation of mental health researchers. Together, we awarded five post-doctoral fellowships for the 2022-23 academic year, worth \$60,000 each:

- [Dr. Oluwakemi Aderibigbe](#) (Nipissing University) set out to improve police officers' ability to identify mental health needs in vulnerable young people.
- [Dr. Stephanie Craig](#) (York University) wanted to see if the Stop Now and Plan

(SNAP) program's approach could help improve developmental outcomes for young people with high callous-unemotional traits.

- [Kylie Mallory](#) (Holland-Bloorview Kids Rehabilitation Hospital) aimed to evaluate a virtual, group-based intervention for siblings of children with special needs.
- [Chloe Lau](#) (University of Toronto) planned to develop and pilot a screening algorithm to improve early identification and interventions for young people who are at-risk of attempting suicide.
- [Matthew Reeson](#) (University of Western Ontario) expanded a pilot project to make a mental health virtual assistant available to young people living in Canada.

We provided \$15,000 to support young people, especially those in rural, Northern and Indigenous communities, to attend [the International Initiative for Mental Health Leadership](#) conference in Washington, D.C. last October. This reflects our commitment to remove barriers for young people to participate in important conversations with experts across the globe about the best way to respond to child and youth mental health and addictions here in Ontario.



Strengthening engagement in Ontario and beyond

An evaluation conducted in 2022 showed that our engagement quality standards coaching program and community of practice are highly valued and appreciated as collective spaces to connect, learn, and solve problems. Still, when it comes to implementing the youth and family engagement standards, agencies say they face several challenges, including a lack of dedicated funding and resources.

Based on this feedback, we created an opportunity to support project teams. Nine agencies received funding and ongoing coaching to support a range of activities designed to remove barriers. Activities include providing dedicated staffing for engagement activities and developing approaches focused on engaging equity-deserving groups.

In early 2023, we received a [catalyst grant](#) from the Canadian Institutes of Health Research as part of a federal investment to develop national mental health and substance use service standards for children and young people. This funding will help us implement the quality standards for youth and family engagement across Ontario, share what we're doing with other provinces and territories, and help develop national standards in this area.

80% of those who have participated in two or more community of practice meetings say that it has increased their capacity to implement the engagement quality standards.



Special thanks

The COVID-19 pandemic presented many human resources challenges, but our staff and partners continued to forge ahead. We're grateful for all the new volunteers that took up the call to join our advisory councils, and for existing members who extended their terms. They all bring invaluable insights and perspectives rooted in lived experience. We couldn't do what we do without their guidance, expertise, and support.

Learn about the members of our:



[Strategic advisory council](#)



[Family advisory council](#)



[Youth advisory council](#)

Financials

Salaries and benefits	\$3,961,694
Office supplies and expenses	\$227,662
Office equipment	\$14,484
Staff training and development	\$19,734
Communication: Promotions, materials, and translation	\$59,330
Staff travel and accommodation	\$19,693
Meeting expenses	\$15,171
Purchased services: Consultants	\$435,214
Distributed funds	\$928,025
Rent	\$107,389
Administration fee	\$611,604
Total:	\$6,400,000



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